

Shifting the focus to the Asian—Pacific region

The *National strategy for the study of Asia in Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1988), recently released by the Asian Studies Council, poses the question, 'We wonder how many Australians realise quite how profoundly Australia lacks the means to plan for and manage its future as part of the Asian region'.

As a professional association, we may ask how well are the nation's librarians qualified to cope with our future in Asia, and how far are our information sources capable of providing relevant information on Asia? How far has the Association itself come to terms with the change of emphasis in Australia from that of a nation linked by culture and history to Europe and North America to one integrated with its neighbours in the Asian—Pacific region?

Exchanging expertise

One positive development might be said to be the increasing number of Australia's senior librarians who are accepting roles as advisers, consultants or educators in Asian countries, particularly through the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges. This should, in theory, lead to greater familiarity by the profession with Asian librarianship.

One could wish for a little more public reporting of the fruits of these visits in order that the knowledge the advisers have themselves gained may be passed on to their Australian colleagues. Other librarians have gone on public relations exercises to coincide with the opening of new libraries in Asian countries, as part of organised 'study tours', or to attend conferences. With notable exceptions there has been comparatively little writing-up of these visits or other follow-up activities to make the benefits available to a wider circle.

The visit last year of Professor Sun Yanchou was an example of how Australian librarians could learn from their Asian colleagues. And two seminars held at ANU (in 1982 and 1988) on the cataloguing of Chinese books, with representatives from libraries of Taiwan and mainland China, have helped us to better understand Chinese book publishing, supply and processing. Again, more Asian library students are coming to Australia for courses or to undertake



work experience. Are they broadening our understanding of Asian librarianship and strengthening ties between Australia and Asian libraries to the extent they could be?

NLA initiative

The meetings of national librarians of Asia and the Pacific, organised by the National Library of Australia (but now discontinued), helped to cement relations at an institutional level, but did they lead to a shift in focus for Australian libraries as a whole? The National Library's aid program has been a commendable attempt to channel the limited resources available for such purposes to the region, but discussion has always taken place on whether the aid should be widely and evenly distributed, or concentrated on fewer projects.

Asian databases

And what of our information services themselves? One of the recommendations of the Ingleson Report on *Asia in Australian higher education* (Canberra: Asian Studies Council, 1989) is that the Council examine 'the most effective way to establish a National Bibliographic Network for Asian Studies'.

This recommendation has been met with raised eyebrows in several quarters. Nevertheless, an effort is required to redress the relative neglect the region has experienced in the past. Is it not a fact that the present national bibliographical database is so Eurocentric that it is unable to accept Asian language entries that are in non-Roman

scripts? As long ago as 1982 the ABN Standards Committee rejected the proposal to include Asian scripts, and, in doing so, lowered the standard for Asian material that has been included. Have not our Asian collections traditionally been seen as quaint and exotic curiosities peripheral to the main part of our library collections, not enjoying the same status in administrative structures?

Furthermore, as Asian scholars will verify, most online databases have a low percentage of Asian content with the information that is supplied often coming via a North American filtration system. This may be all very well for Europe and North America, but Australia as part of Asia requires its information first-hand. Indeed, Australian libraries currently buy only a small proportion of material direct from Asian countries themselves. Would not an Asian Studies Network (or Centre?) enable us to plan and coordinate our efforts to overcome these major deficiencies?

A seminar of Australian librarians with Asian collections in February attempted to tap the Australian Government's current policy of promoting 'Asian literacy' by recommending further investigation of such a concept to the Asian Studies Council.

New outlook

As for the Association itself, our President has recently reminded us of our need to be more outward-looking and of our need to reactivate our International Relations Committee. ALIA has recently established a Special Interest Group on Asia and the Pacific, but the very name of the Group reveals the conservatism of our attitude. To establish such a group betrays our own view of ourselves as people on the outside of Asia and the Pacific looking in. In fact, Australia is part of Asia and the Pacific. Does the (British) Library Association have a European Special Interest Group, or the Canadian Library Association a North American Special Interest Group? Such groups would seem a contradiction in terms.

Neither is a token gesture of including 'Asia' or Pacific in an institutional or conference title good enough. Perhaps the best example of practical involvement in regional professional affairs was

3 Mr Wang Meng (centre), distinguished author and former Minister of Culture in the People's Republic of China, with the ANU Librarian Colin Steele and Susan Prentice, East Asian Librarian.

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the seminar 'Government publications and collection development in the South Pacific area' held in Canberra immediately following IFLA in 1988. It brought together Pacific and Australian librarians and provided an opportunity to discuss common problems and plan solutions.

The need for improvement in our information sources on Asia and the Pacific is acknowledged in many fields, not the least of which is trade. The Australian Trade Commission has recently (*The Age*, 19 May 1989) acknowledged that a (lack of) expertise in 'language and culture and insufficient understanding of differing business environments are inhibiting Australia's trade with Pacific Rim and other markets'.

As an Association, and as individual Australian librarians, we must re-focus our attention so that it is more on the region in which we live to enable us and our fellow countrymen to 'plan for and manage the future as part of the Asian region.'

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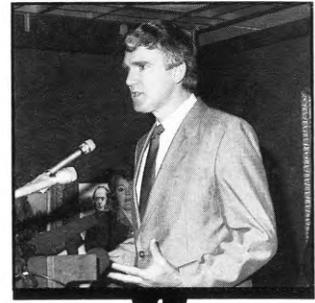
Australian National University

David Williamson's gift

Noted dramatist David Williamson, AO, has made a gift of his Papers to the National Library of Australia under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme. The gift was officially accepted by the Hon. Paul Keating, MP, Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, on 11 October.

David Williamson is a foundation member of the Australia Council for the Arts, current President of the Australian Writers' Guild, and winner of three Awgies.

The manuscripts highlight Williamson's creativity and give an insight into his writing technique. The collection contains many plays and scripts written for films and television dramas. These include *The Coming of the Stork*, *The Removalists*, *Don's Party*, *Travelling North*, *Emerald City*, *Gallipoli*, *Phar Lap* and *The Year of*



Living Dangerously. Supplementary material includes research notes and correspondence relating to the works.

The collection also includes many drafts of plays that remain unfinished, and letters from, and copies of letters to, leading figures in politics, theatre and film, such as Gough Whitlam, Don Dunstan, Patrick White, and Kirk Douglas.

In addition, there is a great wealth of personal material: primary school reports, family letters, diaries, childhood stories and drawings, photographs from Williamson's adolescent years, cuttings from university papers during his student years, and diaries of a trip to China.

4 David Williamson, AO, speaks at the presentation of the Williamson Papers to the National Library. (Photo: National Library)

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